

The Starr-Tripp connection: Evidence mounts that independent counsel orchestrated frame-up of Clinton

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An op-ed column in the October 23 edition of the *New York Times* cites important evidence of collusion between independent counsel Kenneth Starr and lawyers for the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit against Bill Clinton. The author, Richard Ben-Veniste, former chief of the Watergate Task Force in the Watergate special prosecutor's office, makes the case that the independent counsel guided Linda Tripp in her manipulation of Monica Lewinsky.

Ben-Veniste cites compelling evidence that Starr knew of Linda Tripp's tapes of conversations with Lewinsky well before January 12, though he told Attorney General Janet Reno he first learned of the Tripp tapes on that day. Ben-Veniste suggests that Starr and his associates guided Tripp in prodding Lewinsky to approach Clinton confidant Vernon Jordan about a job. The aim was to create the appearance of a quid pro quo, in which Lewinsky was to obtain employment in exchange for her denial, in her affidavit to the Paula Jones lawyers, of a sexual relationship with Clinton. This was then presented as evidence of obstruction of justice and suborning of perjury on the part of the White House.

Ben-Veniste writes, 'The House judiciary committee should investigate to what extent surrogates for Mr. Starr may have provided an unseen hand, directing Ms. Tripp in her manipulation of Monica Lewinsky. Mr Starr's justification for investigating the Lewinsky matter--possible obstruction of justice involving Vernon Jordan--now appears to be a scenario entirely scripted by Ms. Tripp.'

The column raises a number of critical questions:

- Was there collusion between Starr's office and the lawyers for Paula Jones?

Ben-Veniste cites three points that indicate there was such collusion.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Tripp contacted David Pyke, one of Paula Jones' attorneys, as early as November 21, 1997.

Gilbert Davis, a leading member of Paula Jones' original legal team, acknowledged that he and his associates regularly consulted with Theodore Olson, a former Assistant Attorney General in the Reagan administration and a close friend and former law partner of Starr.

Starr's office detained Lewinsky on January 16 on the grounds that her lawyers had filed a false affidavit in the Paula Jones lawsuit. However, according to Starr's report to Congress, the Arkansas Judge overseeing the Paula Jones case did not receive the affidavit until January 17. How did Starr know the contents of the affidavit on January 16? The only conceivable source was the Paula Jones legal team.

- Did Starr lie to Attorney General Janet Reno when he claimed he first learned of the Tripp tapes on January 12?

Linda Tripp's advisor and literary agent Lucianne Goldberg approached people close to the Starr camp about the tapes as early as December 1997. According to the *Washington Post*, when Tripp and Goldberg were warned that the secret tapings of Lewinsky were illegal under Maryland law, Tripp sought a new lawyer. Goldberg and other allies of Tripp sought advice from right-wing lawyers close to Starr, including Olson.

- Did Starr use Tripp to create the appearance of obstruction of justice?

It wasn't until January 9, one week before Clinton's deposition in the Paula Jones case, that Tripp urged

Lewinsky to approach Vernon Jordan about a job. The timing is remarkable. When Starr went to Attorney General Reno the following week to request authority to extend his investigation to the Lewinsky affair, he cited a possible pattern of obstruction on the part of Vernon Jordan, who, Starr alleged, had previously bought the silence of Clinton associate Webster Hubbell.

(There is a significant fact in this connection which Ben-Veniste does not mention. Published excerpts of the Tripp-Lewinsky tapes reveal that Tripp attempted to get Lewinsky to approach not only Jordan, but also White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles for help in landing a job. Lewinsky refused, making the obvious point that such a move could be highly damaging to Clinton.)

Ben-Veniste raises another telling point. Why didn't Starr call Lucianne Goldberg to testify before his grand jury? For someone supposedly driven by a quest for the truth, it is a curious omission. Goldberg was the one who encouraged Tripp to tape record her conversations with Lewinsky and consulted with Tripp every step of the way. Ben-Veniste notes that no one knows what has happened to the tapes Goldberg says she made of her conversations with Tripp in September 1997.

In highlighting the approaches made by Goldberg and the Paula Jones camp to Starr associate Theodore Olson, the Ben-Veniste column touches on a seminal issue. Olson is the human link between Starr and the three groups that have played the most direct role in the political attack on the Clinton White House: the Paula Jones camp, Tripp-Goldberg, and the right-wing forces financed by billionaire publisher Richard Mellon Scaife.

An exposé in the August 2 *Observer*, the Sunday newspaper published by the *Guardian* in Britain, cited Olson's links to forces on the extreme right. It noted that earlier this decade he became board chairman of the *American Spectator*, the publication founded by Scaife that prepared the way for the Jones lawsuit with an article alleging that state troopers had procured women for Clinton while he was governor of Arkansas. The *Observer* also reported that Olson presided over the first meeting of the Arkansas Project, an anti-Clinton organization funded by Scaife.

In addition, Olson served as the lawyer for David Hale, Starr's chief witness against the Clintons in the

Whitewater investigation, representing Hale in 1995 and 1996 when he testified before the US House of Representatives. Hale entered into a plea bargain with Starr, admitting to one count of embezzlement in exchange for testimony against James and Susan McDougal, Clinton's former Whitewater partners.

See Also:

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